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## Moments

Matthew Benjamin McMilon

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**Matthew McMilon**

**Moments**

**I am an interdisciplinary artist, educator and writer from Southern California. My practice explores the ways in which images, text and even something as complex as human identity are all made up of fragmented parts that work together to establish visual narrative. Working across multiple media, I create artworks that are lyrical and chaotic and place them in highly aestheticized conditions. My work depicts universal themes of love, loss and resilience over social and political oppression. Additionally, my work questions ideas of social and personal validity, agency and the visually queer.**

**Regardless of the material I work with, my practice is process driven. I frenetically and obsessively make work, and often utilize cheap photographic processes in order to manipulate painted and drawn compositions in ways that I find aesthetically pleasing. This has been my reductive/ constructive method of making art for over 15 years and it translates into every material I work with. Using lyrical and bold mark-making, as well as obsessive repetition and production-my narratives become visible, command space and speak a universal language despite residing somewhere between complete abstraction and loose figuration.**

*The work in this exhibition is dedicated to Chalon Tayeko Emerald Hoffman, Sharon McMilon and every victim of LGBTQIA systemic violence and social oppression. Select works in this exhibition will be donated to the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles. An additional work will be donated to my mentor, Jan Raithel for her dedication to my practice and education and her commitment to excellence in teaching and advocacy for the rights of marginalized students. All of the works in this exhibition are untitled and not for sale. Special thanks to: Brad Spence, Sant Khalsa, Jane Chin Davidson and the Department of Art.*

*To see more of my work including a new series on public art in Skid Row in 2017, follow me online at*

**<http://www.mattmcmilon.com>**

Matthew McMilon

I began drawing and painting as a young child and was introduced to visual art in primary school. I became heavily involved in the visual arts, music and literature and my passion for the arts expanded as I entered college as I gained more access to a variety of classes. In college, I experimented taking classes in ceramics, painting, sculpture and figure drawing. I continued taking art classes and eventually decided that I wanted to be a professional visual artist in my early twenties. I have always lived a create life; whether it be making music, taking photographs or painting. I have worked in a variety of creative fields, helping professions and educational institutions which I believe have influenced me and shaped my work as an artist. Art making for me was born out of experiences of social marginalization and isolation and has been my sole form of expression in my life.

My practice is interdisciplinary and explores advanced academic research in topics of Gender & Sexuality Studies, specifically Queer and Feminist Theories and how these areas of study shape visual art and culture. Conducting this ongoing research and investigation assists in shaping my identity as an artist and the growth of my own sense of personal aesthetics. I have been doing research, taking courses and living the dual life of Social Scientist/ Artist for over 10 years. I spent three years studying with Raymond Scott (Psychologist) and Zandra Wagoner (Philosopher) at University of La Verne eventually earning my degree in Gender and Sexuality Studies in 2008. Also during this time, I earned a Studio Art degree with an emphasis in painting under the mentorship of artist Ruth Trotter. As an undergraduate student, theorists like Judith Butler, Kate Bornstein and bell hooks became personal favorites and their ideas resonated with me and began to influence my artwork. In addition to reading about theory, I constantly read

about contemporary art and am inspired by artists like Keith Boadwee, Tracey Emin, Ida Applebroog, Sarah Lucas and Paul Thek. I view identity as multidimensional and the human experience as fragmented and scattered. I am interested in the ways in which the fragments of things make up the whole whether it be the pixels in a digital photograph, layers of a painting, or the various elements of human behavior and traits that come together to form what we view as a holistic or complete identity. I am a series of scattered identities. Within me resides masculine and feminine energy, I identify on both sides of the gender binary, I am queer and I am made up of millions of lived experiences. Negative and positive, beautiful and grotesque, subjective and objective. When I create work, I aim to modify space and create a narrative and shift the mood within the space. Thus, in many ways my work is installation based despite being also tied to painting, photography and print making.

In my practice, I am interested in the following areas of direct inquiry:

- What social structures uphold the notion of the queer body as a site of disease and disease/ cultural/ social discomfort? How can visual art-and specifically photographic and performative actions directly obliterate these pre-conceived notions and disrupt the social structures and power dynamics that create them?
- Endurance: How do marginalized artist's individuals uphold privileged practices such as art making? I am interested in writing, researching and talking about the ways that people create lifelong practices.
- How can art subvert the Romantic Love Industrial Complex by reinforcing the aesthetics of romanticism and classical beauty aesthetics? Can ideas of idealization, beauty and romantic love ever be demolished or deconstructed when their origins are so deeply

embedded within our culture? After all, romanticism is based in the social construction of the heteronormative/ and the trope of the hyper-feminine. Why are people and objects that are conventionally “beautiful” so desirable yet repulsive in contemporary art, and art institutions? *Why is pretty such a loaded word?*

- How far can the boundaries of materials be pushed until their materiality becomes a meaningless after-thought and the underlying form, thought or text becomes the focus as opposed to a wow factor of reproducing images of the world from a naturalistic perspective?
- Manufacturing beauty- the notion that enclosed installation art is essentially interior design. I am also interested in styling human subjects, as well manipulating my own body in a variety of ways and documenting processes and outcomes.
- Everything as poetic metaphor- a floral arrangement can be read much deeper than a pretty luxury item. It is life cut from the ground- dying, withering for public or personal enjoyment. If read as a mirror you can see yourself and your physical beauty fading as cells are constantly dying in your own body.

The way that my research shapes my aesthetic is complex. I often choose gendered color palettes to genderfuck and queer the visual scape of my pictorial plane as well as work in binaries and split formatting, obsessive repetition and make aesthetic choices that intentionally provoke feelings of romanticism. I often take conventional colors associated with specific normative genders and use them to subvert those nonsensical traditions. My work makes delicate references to sexuality and sensuality and allows me to create spaces that ultimately transcend constricting social norms surrounding gender, sexuality and identity. Often my work alludes to the space between male and female, the queer and heteronormative, the beautiful and the

grotesque. Thus, my work becomes autobiographical, as these are the spaces I inhabit in my daily life. When I do choose to title my artworks, the titles of my artworks often suggestive, provocative and provide insight to the elusive nature of my images. I create mysterious and primarily abstract with very loose figurative suggestions that are metasexual and explore areas that reside beyond or between gender, social class as well as question traditionalist ideals of beauty as well as the restricting view of what an art object should or should not be. No single work that I produce is precious, but rather multiplicity is key for my work to have impact. In my most recent work, I have been exploring and subverting traditional art concepts like portraiture, landscape and spirituality in art. My last body of work, which I entitled *Wet on Wet*, explored the queered visual double entendre, the space between, and how the sum of many fragments and processes make up the visual “whole.” This tradition has carried on into my culminating exhibition, entitled “Moments”.

The key cultural influences of my art practice include:

- Coming of age in the 1990's: The Real World, the universal visage of gay men dying of HIV/AIDS, the total de-masculinization and re-masculinization of the gay male body in my lifetime, gender fucking, senses of martyrdom and the meek. Working in HIV/ AIDS non-profit sector for years.
- Riot Grrrl, Third-Wave Feminist Aesthetics, pissed off angry women and queer people. Drug addition, sex work as a common place vocation and watching multiple loved ones lose their lives before they even began.
- Punk Rock Sensibilities. Entering “proper” institutions and destabilizing them with flair and presence.

My current interest in my studio is redefining and reinvigorating my practice with the use of mixed-media. I have spent the last year and a half primarily making paintings and photographs and decided that I would like to see more fluidity, blurring and subversion between these materials which has led me to begin photographing my paintings, digitally manipulating them and making prints of them. In turn, I have been making prints of my photographs and manipulating them in a painterly fashion by printing them on various grounds, transparencies and materials. This has been incredibly rewarding for me as I am now questioning materiality, authenticity and image making entirely. In the past I have chosen clean, squared, white-framed presentations not only because I feel that they make my work look polished and refined; but because they once again create a dialogue within contemporary aesthetics about value, preciousness, and my capacity as an emerging and a marginalized artist to make something that redefines both tradition and aesthetics while being completely trapped within them. I enjoy seeing the end product of countless paintings, drawings, ideas, failures finally become a cohesive and beautiful image. But an image is not enough to articulate my underlying aesthetic and desires, thus I work obsessively and frenetically to create "collections". My work since starting graduate studies has transitioned from being very wild and unrefined to somewhat minimal and soft and I am pleased with this transition. I have been told I have a snap shot aesthetic and a frenetic way of working. This is however, also part of the paradoxical nature of how I work. I do not simply take a single photograph and deem it "the one". Rather, I take hundreds of photographs, make hundreds of drawings and paintings and weed through them until I discover the one that speaks to me and aligns with my aesthetic and what I am desiring to express and convey.

Unlike artists that make work for utilitarian use and go into every work with a plan (the entire premise of design), I allow myself to be impulsive and experimental in everything that I do in my work. I am interested in why we are culturally obsessed with these notions and how I as an artist can push, pull and subvert the processes. This means, my work must go through multiple processes, and now as it has matured, blossomed and unfolded. Working in mixed media gives me more control and allows me to cut certain expenses from my budget when making my work. As someone that has worked with a variety of art materials and in varying art contexts this appealed to me. It is not my intention to stop working in ceramics, sculpture, and other materials. However, I have decided that for the rest of this program I would like to dedicate my studies to creating two dimensional work, painting, printmaking, photography. I feel this will not only help me focus in on my desired outcome but also make me more marketable as a professional and strengthen my oeuvre. The way that I will execute this is by continuing to work with faculty that supports this and can assist me in cultivating my vision. I am taking printmaking next quarter which should assist me with reproduction of my work and also give me inspiration and access to other art making materials.

As a queer interdisciplinary artist, there is simply no way for me to entirely ignore issue of personal identity, politics, and issues of agency as they define my daily existence. In our naïve and rather vapid culture it is almost a collective feeling that difference is the new badge of honor and that somehow marginalized people have assimilated and been fully integrated into society regardless of the fact that is not the case. Making the choice to be entirely out in every aspect of my life including professionally, artistically and academically has had massive consequences and inspired my work. Dismissive attitudes toward queer struggle in essentially every aspect of contemporary society fuels and acts as a catalyst for me to continue to work. I experience some



form of homophobia almost daily and to deny this would make my practice and strides toward visibility in vein. Part of my practice is being vocal and advocating for myself. Thus, queering space is at the core of my practice.

Matthew McMilon, Moments

*Photographic Documentation. Mixed Media Installation. Gallery 106, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016- November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016.*

1. Untiled. Mixed-Media Installation. Dimensions Variable. 2016.
2. Untiled. Mixed-Media Installation. Dimensions Variable. 2016.
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